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FCC Denies Time To Democrats, GOP

Associated Press

Requests by the Democratic and Republican National Committees for equal-time appearances on the major networks were rejected yesterday by the Federal Communications Commission.

The Democrats specifically asked for time to reply to four presidential television appearances. The Republicans sought time to reply to an ABC broadcast which presented the Democratic response to an earlier presidential appearance.

The Democrats asked for time to reply to what they said were partisan views expressed by the President in an ABC interview on March 22, an NBC interview on March 15, and an April 7 presidential speech aired by NBS and CBS.

The Democrats also wanted at least one time period in which to voice reaction to four other presidential appearances.

All three networks opposed the requests of both party organizations. Each network contended that it had not violated the FCC's Fairness Doctrine in declining to provide the requested response time, and each listed programs in which contrasting views were presented.

Elaborating on its earlier decision covering similar requests, the FCC said that "while Presidents and other public officials do report to the public, and the officials making these reports are most often engaged in setting forth the wisdom of the particular actions on which the reports are given," it is a "wholly impracticable quagmire for this agency to attempt to evaluate how much 'partisan' material is contained in a particular report."

The FCC stressed that its denial of requests by both

party groups did not turn upon any attempt to make any evaluation of partisanship.

The agency held that the Communications Act makes clear "that it is fairness, not equal opportunities, which should apply to the situation and that appearances of public officials during non-election periods should come under the fairness doctrine."

The FCC thus differentiated between non-campaign-type appearances and campaign time purchased by candidates.

The commission previously has ruled that were a spokesman for a candidate buys time and goes on the air with a particular comparable time to an opposing candidate or his supporters.